

THE ESSENCE OF ESCHATOLOGY: A MODAL INTERPRETATION

John Davenport, *University of Notre Dame, Department of Philosophy, South Bend, IN 46556 USA*

1. INTRODUCTORY REFLECTIONS: ESCHATOLOGY VS. THE FOUNDATIONALIST NOTION OF ULTIMACY

In discussing St. Ignatius of Loyola's faith, Fiore Mester, echoing Anselm, argues that

[the] ultimate is the condition of not being possible to go beyond. In this formulation the term 'ultimate' signifies the limits of the beginning and of the end of a dynamical process. The Christian symbol of the 'Alpha and Omega' attempts to convey this concept (Mester, 1995, p. 88).

As the last letter, 'Omega' serves here as a metonym for the *eschaton*. 'Eschatology' is a theological term denoting the logos of 'last things'. It also refers, *secundum*, to a body of doctrine covering such familiar themes as a Day of Judgment, a 'final hereafter', and a new perfection that may or may not include continuing personal existence, bodily resurrection, or the transformation of the natural world. Our cultural context thus provides a proximate, everyday understanding of what eschatology means: in this sense, it is a specific component in western religions such as Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In an even more vague and reduced sense, eschatology is understood by popular culture as the theme of bad movies such as *Omen*. When thus completely levelled off, eschatology may seem to have little significance for understanding conceptions of ultimate reality and meaning (URAM) in human history.

Yet, when properly understood, the ideals projected by eschatological beliefs are directly relevant for comprehending the various conceptions of the Absolute and ultimate meaning surveyed in this journal. This section offers a preliminary defense of this claim by outlining a series of hypotheses that clarify the potential relevance of eschatology as an area of URAM research. Indeed, I am convinced that eschatology is so rel-

evant for the project of URAM studies that I eventually hope to defend in greater depth the following hypothesis:

(A) *The very notion of ultimacy is originally eschatological, and thus the concept of finality explicitly involved in many conceptions of URAM is derivative from the original, distinctive meaning of eschatological finality.*

If accepted, this hypothesis would require a basic reorientation in our systematic thinking about ultimate reality and meaning. It challenges not so much particular conceptions of URAM but rather our proleptic notion of what makes them conceptions of URAM to begin with, i.e. the *function* which such conceptions are supposed to play, or the leading concept we use to recognize ideas we form about ultimate reality and meaning' (Horvath, 1993, p. 2). The description of this journal deriving from its founder takes the primary function or leading concept of ultimacy to mean 'that to which the human mind reduces and relates everything and that which one does not reduce and relate to anything else'. The problem with this gloss, however, is that it assimilates ultimacy too quickly to the notion of a *foundation of intelligibility*, in the sense deriving originally from Eleatic philosophy. This in turn leads to the assumption that ultimacy appears in three basic forms – 'ontological (reality), epistemological (hermeneutic principle), or ethical (value) ...' (ibid.) – since these are the three basic philosophical senses in which a principle, ideal, value, or entity can be 'foundational' for others.

This foundationalist triad admittedly has a paramount position in western metaphysical and theological traditions: for example, in his article on Ripalda, John Perry argues that if God were not the ultimate ontological, epistemological, and ethical principle, 'then God would no longer be God' (Perry, 1993, p. 185). This may be true, but are these conditions sufficient to define divinity? If instead we identify divinity with the source of our awareness of eschatological possibilities, or with the power and right of *bringing about the eschaton* – however this is conceived – have we not said something *more*, something intrinsically richer and undervivable from these other aspects of divinity? Perhaps one might respond that God's eschatological role is merely entailed by his omnipotence and omnibenevolence, and is therefore included in the traditional Anselmian notion of God as the being uniquely satisfying a list of omni-concepts or maximal properties. I believe this assumption involves a deep and unrecognized error: as I will argue, the eschatological status of divinity in western religion involves a kind of *finality* that cannot be derived from other categories; rather, its meaning must already be presupposed for us to infer it from other features philosophers have often tried to attribute to God on the basis of innate knowledge or unaided human reason.

This is the underlying reason why eschatological doctrines were not generally considered part of *natural theology* by medieval philosophers. Thus when Herbert of Chertbury, the founder of deism, described the promise of eschatological justice as the fifth of five 'propositions' supposedly 'common to all human beings' (Tadie, 1995, p. 266), he initiated a real break from tradition. A longer account than I can give here could show that this attempt to incorporate eschatology within the deliverances of reason cul-

minated in Kant's thesis that hope for a 'possible world' realizing the 'highest good' (a perfect match between moral worth and happiness) can be presupposed as a 'postulate' on the grounds of pure practical reason alone (Kant, 1993, p. 117). To this, Dryden's response that Herbert's fifth postulate derives from 'Revel'd Religion' rather than natural religion is appropriate (Tadde, 1995, p. 268-9).

There are *prima facie* reasons, then, to doubt the foundationalist approach to ultimacy. In his 1980 paper, Horvath develops this approach by suggesting that the ultimate as the absolutely *non-relative* to which everything else reduces is based on a 'time-model' of mental activity passing through thoughts to 'the last one, the "ultimate one", where it stops and rests' (Horvath, 1980, p. 144). It is unclear, however, that the notion of ultimacy as ontological ground involved here can really be measured in terms of a temporal *terminus*. As alternatives, Horvath then suggests two other interpretations: the 'space-model' which conceives ultimacy on the phenomenological 'paradigm of the total, complete, and comprehensive horizon,' and the idealist model of 'an epistemic subject as the center of every activity,' the ground of 'perfect intelligibility, i.e. where every question stops' (Horvath, 1980, p. 145). In addition, Horvath claims that all three of these concepts of ultimacy 'follow from the particular nature of man' whose consciousness is spatial, temporal, and personal (Ibid) – thus suggesting that his three notions of ultimacy have a naturalistic root.

But hypothesis (A), which suggests that the most primordial meaning of ultimacy is eschatological, indicates the possibility that these foundationalist concepts of ultimacy and their alleged natural bases may be inadequate or even distortive in guiding URAM research. If we follow Horvath, then the process of projecting an 'ultimate or total horizon' (Horvath, 1980, p. 148) aims to overcome the differences between competing conceptions of URAM that result from apparently conflicting strata of 'intentionality-types' (ibid., p. 159-161), i.e. it aims at what Hans-George Gadamer would have called a 'fusion of horizons.' Like *scientific unification*, this is a search for the ultimate *explication* of our different kinds of experience (ibid., p. 159). Thus,

the perception and affirmation of the ultimate reality and meaning is [sic] then the discovery of explicans of the explicandum that is the discord of the various intentionality-types ... In Polanyi's words it is the activity of man's tacit power of shaping and integrating the strata into a whole, forming the context of contexts, the horizon of horizons (Ibid., p. 160).

According to Horvath, this is the question any conception of URAM answers, or it is the role which defines the 'concept' of URAM: any conception of URAM proposes a **"marginal" organizing principle which controls the strata by relating the lower to the higher** (Ibid., p. 161).

But is this right? This notion of ultimacy assumes that our fundamental relation to the Absolute is one of rational understanding: it comes from the same phenomenological tradition that led Heidegger to identify the Absolute sought in German Idealism with the 'jointure' of all beings (Heidegger, 1985, p. 50), and to conceive the meaning of Being (*Sinn von Sein*) as the transcendent ground of possibility of all the transcen-

dental categories or 'basic concepts' of each domain of meaning or region of experience (Heidegger, 1962, p. 29-30). Similarly, Horvath's notion of ultimacy leads him to the conclusion that there is 'a science of ultimate reality and meaning' (Horvath, 1980, p. 161, my italics), whose 'analytic criterion' judges alternative conceptions of URAM according to their 'power of solving ever greater numbers of problems and anomalies in competition with other paradigms of [URAM]' (Horvath, 1993, p. 7). The analogy between this criterion, Hempel's model of scientific explanation, and Kuhn's model of theoretical adequacy, even leads Horvath to say that the *ultimacy* of our conceptions of URAM is partially empirical (Horvath, 1980, 162). Ronald Glasberg's recent suggestion that deepening our 'apprehension' of ultimate reality and meaning may occur through 'exploring the isomorphic relations' between conceptions of URAM (Glasberg, 1996, p. 75-76) gives a more medieval version of the same foundationalist approach: the Absolute is the 'transcendental' that runs *analogically* through all conceptions of URAM and therefore stands out in their analogical relations.

By contrast, the thesis that URAM is originally eschatological provides a standpoint for disputing Horvath's parameters and the foundationalist approach in general. By offering a new way of conceiving the very concept of ultimacy – or the very function of URAM conceptions – it opens the possibility of a radically different criterion for judging how well variant conceptions of URAM fulfill the role which ultimacy demands. For a corollary of hypothesis (A) will be:

(B) That conception of URAM is 'valid' which is *most fully eschatological*, or which most adequately captures or expresses the essential meaning of eschatological ultimacy.

This hypothesis clearly requires a detailed defense that is beyond the scope of this paper (but which I hope to provide in a later essay); yet at this point, we can already see that if (B) is accepted, it will require us to look for the measure of URAM conceptions in a general interpretation of what eschatology signifies – or what different conceptions of eschatology share in common.

This brings us to a distinction which is crucial for the subsequent discussion. In the same way as I have distinguished between the *concept* of ultimacy as such and the various *conceptions* of URAM whose characteristic function is described by the concept of ultimate reality and meaning, we must distinguish between the concept or distinctive structure of eschatology and the variant conceptions, doctrines, and belief-systems which portray eschatological events and the hereafter in so many diverse fashions. Thus on one level, this essay will analyze the 'core meaning' of eschatology, or the distinctive features which make some beliefs about divinity, salvation, history, and ethics **recognizably eschatological** (while other ideas on these subjects remain non-eschatological). To get a complete understanding of the 'essence' of eschatology that is exemplified in all its manifestations, however, on the second level we will need to review the *four basic kinds* of 'eschatological conceptions' (or doctrines or beliefs), which cover virtually every particular interpretation of 'the end of time' in human culture. In the historical relation between these kinds of eschatological conception, we will find the clues needed to disclose the underlying meaning of eschatology as such. It is only

against the background of such a clarification, I believe, that we will really be able to discern how pervasive the influence of eschatological ideas is in many different areas. This leads to a further hypothesis:

(C) When seen against the background of the essential features of eschatology, many *apparently* non-eschatological conceptions of ultimate reality and meaning actually involve implicitly eschatological elements.

A full defense of this hypothesis is also beyond the scope of this paper, but three examples can illustrate its significance. (i) For instance, Charles Peirce's pragmatist conception of URAM might seem unrelated to last judgment and salvation, but his definition of truth as that opinion which is 'fated to be ultimately agreed on' by an ideal community of interpreters (Boulting, 1993, p. 16) necessarily refers to an *ideal future* that is separated by a breach of finality from continued investigation – in other words, to the scientific analog of a *heretofore*. When Peirce argues that there is a fact of the matter when inquiry under favorable conditions will converge on a single result and no fact of the matter on 'questions concerning which the pendulum of opinion *would* never cease to oscillate, however favorable the circumstances' (Peirce, 1905, p. 498; my italics), his subjunctive conditional refers not to the nearest possible world (as in David Lewis's modal semantics), nor to an indefinitely later period of time as modern interpreters may suggest, but rather to an implicitly eschatological 'Future', a *desirability* in which 'our inference, which was only provisional, corrects itself *at last*' (Peirce, 1892, p. 328).

(ii) This is even clearer in William James' definition of the 'absolutely true' as 'what no further experience will ever alter ... that ideal vanishing-point towards which we imagined that all our temporary truths will someday converge' (James, 1948, p. 171), which he analogizes to religious finality: 'things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the final word' (Ibid., p. 105). It is just for this reason that we must choose some beliefs before certainty is possible, before 'doomsday' as he says (Ibid., p. 108).

(iii) As hypothesis (C) predicts, beliefs that may involve eschatological ideas are often not recognized as such. For example, in his discussion of the Krobo culture, Hugo Huber argues that 'The sublime objective of Krobo religion is neither eschatological nor transcendental, even though Maau, the creator deity, is believed to determine life and destiny of man'; his reason for this assessment is that 'salvation is located in this world ...' for the Krobo (Huber, 1980, p. 255). This reveals, however, that Professor Huber is working from a common but overly narrow notion of the eschatological: as *my analysis will show, salvation need not be located in an eternity completely separate from the time of this life for it to be conceived eschatologically.*

These examples are not meant to imply that all conceptions of ultimate reality and meaning are reducible to eschatology, or that there are no genuinely *non-eschatological* ideals of URAM (whatever we might say about their adequacy). Hypothesis (C) does imply, however, that our received intuitions about where to draw the line between ideas that are, and are related to eschatology, may be deceptive. As in the cases of Peirce,

James, and the Krobo mythology, the dependence on eschatological paradigms of finality is often only implicit and must be brought out.

II. SUMMARY: FIVE THESES ON ESCHATOLOGY AND URAM

These illustrations underscore the need for a general interpretation of eschatology as a *kind of meaning* found in many different conceptions of ultimate reality. This paper will focus on providing the framework for such a 'fundamental hermeneutic' of eschatology; consequently, I can only aim to defend a more modest set of theses than the three hypotheses suggested above. My approach to the general question begins with the following thesis:

(1) Eschatology is integrally related to the topic of ultimate reality and meaning because there is an entire 'family' of conceptions of URAM, divisible into several historical groups, which are recognizably eschatological. The meaning of *eschatology as such*, which they share in common, is distinct from these particular eschatological beliefs.

The analysis of eschatology will therefore provide a deeper understanding of an entire class of conceptions of URAM.

The answer to this primary question is spelled out in three cumulative stages in the paper: each provides a more fully specified explanation of the conditions isolated in the previous stage. In §III, I argue that the first step towards the essential meaning of eschatology is already implied in the work of Søren Kierkegaard and John Hick, which both suggest a *modal* interpretation of eschatology as distinguished by the unique sort of possibility it projects:

(2) The kind of meaning distinctive of eschatology is a type of 'possibility' beyond all rational reckoning, whose modal sense is neither that of physical possibilities in future time, nor that of eternal ethical possibilities which remain purely ideal; rather, the *eschatologically possible* refers to a 'hereafterness' whose meaning is essentially in tension between the temporal and the atemporal.

If this thesis is right, it explains why eschatological ultimacy cannot be the *foundation* of rational intelligibility in general; rather, it constitutes an order of meaning incommensurable with others.

The second stage consists in showing that eschatological possibility is more specifically the possibility of a *saving* or 'soteriological' realization of the Good in the Real, which is not implied in either of these concepts by themselves. This conclusion is reached in §VI, but the analysis begins in §IV–V with the argument that it is the emergence of independent ethical valuation which brings about the transformation described in Mircea Eliade's anthropology from cosmogonic divinity identified with the sacredness of primordial time to eschatological divinity. Thus it is personal openness to absolute ethical norms and ideals, which begins in the 'axial period' (800–200 B.C.), that makes possible the new notion of an incalculable convergence between the Good and

the Real – a convergence expressed in different ways by every distinctively eschatological faith or system of ideas in the history of human culture. This leads to a third thesis:

- (3) Eschatological ideas of URAM only became possible because of the emergence in the 'axial age' of ideas of the Good and universal truth distinct from the cosmogonic divinity characteristic of archaic religions.

The argument for this thesis will also explain why we cannot identify eschatological ultimacy with the highest principles that found ethical value, or with the 'ground projects' that give us reason to live and for which we would therefore die (Williams, 1981, p. 13). The relation between the ethical and the eschatological is more complex. As C.S. Lewis says (with particular reference to Christianity) in his essay on 'The World's Last Night', the apocalyptic promise of the Gospels adds something essential to religion that is not provided by its 'moral and social teaching' (Lewis, 1960, p. 96), but the whole gospel including its ethical teaching also cannot be reduced to its apocalyptic message either (Lewis, 1960, pp. 94–5).

The third stage completes our analysis of the essential meaning of eschatology by locating the 'core features' of eschatological beliefs that are involved in the meaning of eschatological possibility as a convergence of the Real with the Good. This core structure becomes apparent through an analysis (in §VII–VIII) of the historical progression through three basic kinds of eschatological beliefs and their relation to fundamental changes in the experience of time. This analysis is not intended as an exhaustive cross-cultural comparison of eschatological faiths; rather, its point is to disclose something like a 'logic of genesis' underlying the development of different kinds of possible eschatological conceptions, which further clarifies how the eschatological modality they share is constituted. On this basis, I will also suggest that the kind of eschatological conception that most fully expresses the balance between temporality and eternity required by eschatological possibility is the late form which conceives the eschaton as breaking into the historical order of time:

- (4) In this most radical form of eschatology, the end or hereafter is conceived as a culmination and fulfillment that is richer than the beginning; being as a whole thus acquires an absolute forward asymmetry, since the hereafter is not simply a 'return' to the cosmogonic paradise or divine origin.

As we will see, this is the conception of eschatological ultimacy which is evident in several existentialist authors influenced by Søren Kierkegaard and the Judeo-Christian tradition.

While it may prove controversial, the view that there is an order of progression in eschatological ideas has the advantage of focusing attention on the issue of historical development in conceptions of ultimate reality and meaning. This question is too rarely the focus of URAM research – although in one recent attempt to address it, Ronald Glasberg argues that the differentiation between ultimate and immediate reality is related to the eschatological significance of death in Western culture (Glasberg, 1995,

p. 309–310). Indeed, the topic of eschatology has arisen in many different articles in this journal, but no attempt has been made to examine their systematic interconnection and their relation to the notion of ultimacy in general.

Yet the objection is likely to arise that systematic attention to eschatology is not needed, since the 'time-model' of ultimacy already allows for the relevance of eschatological ideas and even gives an account of their natural basis. As Horvath explains:

... man, who sees everything spatially, exists temporally. Consequently he wants to see the beginning and the end of all that he sees and understands. This tendency operates in the classical form of science, where to understand means to understand either the origin (cause) or the end (meaning) (Horvath, 1980, p. 145).

This explanation assumes that ultimate meaning as finality is simply the correlate of ultimacy as foundational origin, and that both have their naturalistic basis in our experience of temporal processes as having a beginning and end. But these assumptions are untenable for several reasons, as §IV–VII will show. For not only is the narrative shape of time as having two termini a later development not entailed by bare linearity; in addition:

- (5) Eschatology derives not from the natural experience of time as linear, but from the cosmogonic idea of a primordial time that has no evident naturalistic source and which originally operates against the linearly natural to human time-consciousness.

Nor is the eschaton merely a future reflection of the cosmogonic beginning. Thus eschatology cannot be accommodated within the concept of ultimacy Horvath has laid out. His framework would leave us only two unsatisfactory options: (a) either we marginalize eschatology from the discussion of ultimate meaning – a move whose ironies would be hard to conceal; or (b) we relate ultimacy to eschatology only at the cost of misconstruing the eschatological as the horizon of intelligible possibilities, or as the foundation of the Good, or as the ground of being – when in fact eschatology can be reduced to none of these roles. As the five theses to be defended in this paper demonstrate, the meaning of eschatology thus demands separate systematic treatment in its own right.

III. ESCHATOLOGY AS A MODAL CATEGORY OF MEANING

The first step towards a deeper understanding of eschatology is to be found in Søren Kierkegaard's existentialism, which influenced later philosophers such as Heidegger, Jaspers, Levinas, and Berdyaev, in whose writings eschatological ideas play crucial but rarely discussed roles. A review of Kierkegaard's notion of 'the religious' as a sphere or stage of human existence will provide the basis for thesis (2), which says that eschatology is a special modal concept.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard portrayed religious faith as eschatological hope for an actual realization of 'ethical' ideals in the world of temporal finitude (the 'aes-

thetic'), or belief in an anticipated victorious 'turn' in time. He recognized that belief in such a miraculous reprieve, which distinguishes religious faith from pure ethical devotion to universal principles, means faith in a *kind of possibility* distinct from all others. Like causal possibilities of natural law, social possibilities of culture, characterological possibilities of volition, and moral possibility defined by an ideal standard of right action and virtuous will, the eschatological is a form of *synthetic* possibility – meaning it is distinct from merely *logical* possibility. But unlike all these other 'synthetic' forms of modality, the eschatological is beyond human comprehension and rational calculation. The 'religious' stands out as a distinct category for Kierkegaard precisely because it involves a personal relation to a kind of possibility whose meaning is *sui generis*.

Kierkegaard's famous contrast between the knight of 'infinite resignation' and the 'knight of faith' is meant to illustrate just this point. The former accepts that it is not socially possible for him to marry his beloved princess, but he resolves to love her infinitely nevertheless. As Kierkegaard's pseudonym *Johannes de Silentio* writes,

Fools and young people say that everything is possible for a human being. But that is a gross error. Spiritually speaking, everything is possible, but in the finite world there is much that is not possible. The knight, however, makes this impossibility possible by expressing it spiritually, but he expresses it spiritually by renouncing it (Kierkegaard, 1984, p. 44).

In other words, the knight of infinite resignation trades a social possibility, which is denied to him, for an eternal *moral* possibility that validates his love, 'an eternal form that no actuality can take away from him' (Kierkegaard, 1984, pp. 43–44). The knight of faith is different: he also admits that there is no *human* nor epistemically justified possibility of requiring his love, but *in spite* of this,

... he makes one more movement even more wonderful than all the others, for he says: Nevertheless I have faith that I will get her – that is, by virtue of the absurd, by virtue of the fact that for God all things are possible. The absurd does not belong to differences that lie within the proper domain of the understanding. It is not identical with the improbable, the unexpected, the unforeseen (Kierkegaard, 1984, p. 46).

This distinctively divine possibility is unrelated to the other synthetic modalities that govern rational human judgment: the miraculous outcome remains eschatologically possible, even if it is naturally or socially improbable. Similarly, an outcome that might seem **characterologically impossible** can also be **eschatologically possible**, e.g., in a sudden conversion of one's character through grace. In every case, it is an essential distinguishing mark of possibility in the eschatological sense that it cannot be controlled, brought about, or predicted by *human agency*. It is epistemically and practically *unmapproriable* and in that sense Absolute. For this reason, trying to control or calculate it constitutes an attempt to *misappropriate* the eschatological.

Nor is this divine 'modality of the absurd' the same as what Kierkegaard calls 'spiritual

possibility' or possibility 'in the infinite sense'. These refer to *ethical* possibilities with respect to an eternal, normative ideal: thus, as he says of the knight's hope to have the maiden, 'in the *infinite* sense it was possible, that is, by relinquishing it ... Nevertheless, to the understanding this having is no absurdity, for the understanding continues to be right in maintaining that in the *finite* world where it dominates this having was and continues to be an impossibility' (Kierkegaard, 1984, p. 47). By contrast, the divine possibility is 'absurd' precisely because it is a possibility for the temporal world of finitude. In Kierkegaard's famous interpretation of the *Akedah* (or 'binding of Isaac'), Abraham's faith is the same in this essential respect: the *εὐλογ* towards which Abraham suspends 'the ethical' is an absolute belief in the divine possibility of a reprieve that would actually realize the ethical *in time*, even where no human possibility of accomplishing this exists: 'even in the moment when the knife gleamed he had faith – that God would not require Isaac' (Kierkegaard, 1984, p. 36). This interpretation is, of course, not the only possible reading of the *Akedah*, but it does bring out the uniqueness of a particular *kind* of hope – which we might call 'hope beyond all rationally grounded hope' – that is essential to eschatological faith.

In this existential reflection, we have the germ of our core idea: eschatological reality has determinate meaning for us as a unique kind of possibility that is distinct from all others. G. van der Leeuw arrives at the same conclusion in his literary analysis of 'adunata', the jostle sayings that refer to an impossible moment in time' (van der Leeuw, 1957, p. 339). His example is the witches' prophecy to Macbeth that he will not fall until Birnam forest moves by itself to Dunsinane Hill: 'And the incredible happens: the wood moves up to judgment against the wicked king ... In these adunata there lives eschatology; the myth of the impossible' (Ibid., pp. 339–40). Or, more exactly, because the movement of the forest appears to be physically impossible, it symbolizes *another* more uncanny kind of possibility: namely that fate will bring Macbeth's evil to its just end.

Van der Leeuw could also have cited the riddles that figure in apocalyptic combat myths (such as those describing the battle between Indra and Vrtra) as 'adunata'. It is no accident that these riddles often refer to apparently impossible or paradoxical states of affairs, which turn out to be possible (as in many 'trickster' stories, the paradoxical combination often turns on *liminal* symbolism). The uncanniness communicated by the *realization* of such apparent impossibilities derives from its ability to suggest or express another ineffable kind of possibility that is purely eschatological. In other words, 'adunata' are expressions of a kind of modality that in the last analysis cannot be translated into any other terms.

In a very different context, something similar is implied by John Hick's famous reply to positivist arguments that religious claims are meaningless because they are empirically unverifiable. Following Ian Crombie, Hick proposes the notion of eschatological verification' of religious claims by the experience of a beatific vision in the Hereafter. As he points out, such a verification would not be 'an *ad hoc* invention' because it relates confirmation of the existence of the Divine to the expectations entailed by a particular conception of divinity (Hick, 1960, pp. 58–59). In the Christian conception, for example, the eschatological 'final verification' would occur through the survival of a

person (perhaps with a new 'spiritual body') in what Hick calls a 'resurrection world' whose space is entirely distinct from our own (Ibid., pp. 64-66). Furthermore, Hick thinks it would have to include an experience, such as the 'Beatific Vision of God', that would allow the person to apprehend this resurrection world 'as the fulfillment of God's purpose and not simply as a natural state of affairs' (Ibid., pp. 66-68). In other words, the verifying experience would have to include a certain perception that the world is changed and its ultimate purpose is realized.

Although Hick does not suggest this — because he believes that only 'ultimate universal salvation' (Ibid., p. 70) is consistent with the idea of the absolute Real — the state of 'damnation' could also be conceived as a possibility of final verification. Consider C.S. Lewis' suggestion that an essential purpose of Hell is that the damned should not be eternally without recognition of their absolute error (Lewis, 1986, pp. 121-122). Even if damnation simply consists in the final fixity of evil will, or the bad person's eternally 'being what he is', namely a being who wills 'to live wholly in the self' (Ibid., p. 123), Lewis follows Aquinas and others in holding that damnation must include an irresistible revelation of the truth, a vindication of the Good the damned have rejected.

As a response to the positivist, 'eschatological verification' makes a Kantian point: even though there is no this-worldly verification for religious faith, it remains meaningful in virtue of a special kind of *possibility*, which we might describe formally in terms of a range of *possible hereafters*. But there is still the problem of understanding what this kind of possibility is, which distinguishes eschatological 'hereafters', for example, from the logical possibility of an alternate physical universe or the causal ('nomological') possibilities of a future period of time. Hick sees this problem when he says that the central question for his notion of eschatological verification is 'the relation between the physical world and the resurrection world' (Hick, 1960, p. 62). But as we shall see, this question turns out to be far more difficult than Hick suggests. In addition, as we saw with Kierkegaard, the relation of eschatological reality to moral ideality is also extremely ambiguous. Thus, in order to fill out our first characterization of eschatology as a special kind of possibility, the next stage of the analysis must clarify the relation of eschatology to experiences of temporality and to ethical ideality.

IV. ESCHATOLOGY AND COSMOGONY

This section presents most of the grounds for thesis (5) and prepares us for thesis (3). There is little doubt that eschatological ideas of 'final time' initially grew out of earlier cosmological mythologies focusing on the creation of the world. The most penetrating account of this process to date is the one given by the historian of religion, Mircea Eliade. As David Leigh remarks in his analysis of ultimacy in literature, Eliade held that 'The study of symbolism in cosmic religions begins ... with a distinction in human experience between the *sacred* and the *profane*' (Leigh, 1995, p. 229). This much is not unique to Eliade: like many other mythographers, he recognizes in world mythologies a basic division between divinity as the sacred source of being, form, and intelligibility, and the profane as chaotic, formless, and destructive, or 'chthonic'. Following Rudolph Otto, Eliade says 'The sacred always manifests itself as a reality of a wholly different

order from natural realities' (Eliade, 1959, p. 10). Similarly, in his essay on 'Mircea Eliade's Hermeneutics', Adrian Marino notes that

For Mircea Eliade, exegesis begins with a fundamental dissociation of *sacred* and *profane* meanings. The dissociation and opposition of the sacred-profane constitutes the deepest and broadest hermeneutical relationship possible ... the sacred appears and is defined by its opposition to the profane; the profane appears and is defined by its opposition to the sacred (Marino, 1982, p. 37).

However, as Marino realizes, for Eliade the reciprocal and complementary relation between these opposites does not imply that any monism can contain them both. Rather, mythological significance as a whole exists in the interrelation of two mutually *irreducible* poles of meaning. Eliade speaks of the abyss that divides the two modalities of experience — sacred and profane, and he describes these poles in Heideggerian fashion as 'two modes of being in the world' (Eliade, 1959, p. 14). Mythological significance is thus irreducibly diadic according to Eliade, and yet these unassimilable dimensions of sacred and profane meaning still meet in what Eliade calls *hierophany*: the entrance of the sacred into the profane world. As David Leigh aptly summarizes:

In this study of the hierophany, Eliade emphasizes that, first, the sacred is absolutely and qualitatively different from the profane; second, the sacred is able to manifest itself in the profane; third, the profane remains always what it is but can take on more 'reality' through a meeting with the sacred (Leigh, 1995, p. 229).

Original hierophany occurs in what Martin Buber (1960) calls the *sacramental* relation: some object, event or process in the profane world becomes an opening to the sacred, or serves as the site for the entrance of the sacred. For example, when the sacred is manifested in a totem stone or tree, Eliade insists that it is not *qua stone* or *qua tree* that they are venerated; rather, the paradox is that they remain in the profane milieu while nevertheless becoming a hierophany of a sacred which is 'wholly other' (Eliade, 1959, p. 12). Thus, 'It is impossible to overemphasize the paradox represented by every hierophany, even the most elementary' (Ibid., p. 12).

As Leigh points out, such original instances of hierophany must be distinguished from the symbolic or 'mediate hierophany': 'By this, Eliade means that the symbol is an extension or continuation of the original manifestation of the divine, which organizes and expresses original hierophanies to repeat and perpetuate the hierophanization of profane reality (Leigh, 1995, pp. 229-230). According to Eliade, this is the process that constitutes *being itself in archaic religion*: 'for "primitives", nature is a hierophany, and "laws of nature" are the revelation of the general mode of existence of divinity' (Eliade, 1974, p. 59).

It is this innovative interpretation of hierophany that enables Eliade to perceive something previous mythographers had missed: eschatology is prefigured in the ordinary opposition of the sacred and the profane, and later explicitly eschatological doctrines of religions such as Zoroastrianism and Judaism are related to the earlier

cosmogonic focus of all 'archaic' religion. In his *Myth and Reality*, as in other works, he describes the division of sacred and profane in temporal terms: 'Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings"' (Eliade, 1963, p. 5). But this cosmogonic primordality 'in *illo tempore*', as Eliade calls it, is not conceived as an earlier point in linear time; rather, 'profane' time becomes *cyclical* by its continual *recreation* through the power of primordial Time. The recitation of origin myths and the performance of rituals of renewal are 'not a commemoration of mythical events but a reiteration of them' (Ibid., p. 19). And through this process, 'by "living" the myths one emerges from profane, chronological time and enters ... a "sacred" Time at once primordial and indefinitely recoverable' (Ibid., p. 18).

Several studies that have appeared in *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* corroborate this analysis. To mention just one, Carl Starckoff acknowledges that in Arapaho cosmogonic myth, the "'center of the world" image describes the fundamental cosmological "ultimate reality"' (Starckoff, 1995, p. 253), and that this archetype (which Eliade has described in many cultures) symbolizes the goal in the Arapaho 'quest for the primordial':

The fact that origin myths are part of tribal ritual suggests that those myths and ritual served to restore the values of what Eliade and Van der Leeuw have called 'sacred space' and 'sacred time', where 'power' was greatest and life was full (Ibid., p. 261).

In this paradox of sacred reality as simultaneously *past* and yet *recoverable*, we have the mirror image of the sacred *heretofore*. Eschatological belief thus develops out of the 'mythico-ritual scenario of annual World regeneration':

... after a certain historical moment, this motif becomes 'moveable': it can now signify not only the perfection of the beginnings in the mythical past but also the perfection that is to come in the future (Eliade, 1963, p. 75).

The essential idea of an *end of time* is already contained within the archaic significance of primordial Time. Eschatology and cosmogony are two sides of the same coin: 'Eschatology is only the prefiguration of a cosmogony to come' (Ibid., p. 52). Eliade makes the same point in a remark about a Native American ritual in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*:

Since the mythical visions of the 'beginning' and the 'end' of time are homologues - eschatology, at least in certain aspects, becoming one with cosmogony - the exaltation of the ghost-dance religion reactualized the mythical *illud tempus* of Paradise, of primordial plenitude (Eliade, 1974, p. 73).

But the shift from cosmogonic to eschatological expressions of ultimate reality depends on the interaction of several other factors that are not immediately apparent. First, although in archaic religion, sacred Reality is brought into profane existence

through a *cyclic* pattern created by rituals of renewal that allow *escape* into primordial Time, this interpretation of sacred significance cannot simply be a naturalistic result of recognizing the cyclic pattern in the seasons. As with the stone and tree example, Eliade argues that the sacred cycle of ritual is not identical with the biological pattern of the natural 'year', because it gets its meaning from the idea of restoring the perfection of an *absolute* beginning. Seasonal experience by itself can hardly furnish this original cosmogonic intuition; rather, the seasonal cycle can only become invested with symbolic significance by minds that are already familiar with the *in illo tempore*. Thus the essential function of a cyclic conception of time is not to 'make sense' etiologicaly of the seasons (that is at most a secondary and incidental result), but to *prevent* memory and natural continuity from making time into a linear, 'historical' structure. Ritual recreation stops memory from 'revealing the irreversibility of events, that is, of recording history' (Ibid., p. 75) by enforcing a cyclic pattern of recreation that is a *projection* of 'non-natural' sacred significance into profane temporality. Even within the archaic ontology, people feel the need for 'periodic regeneration' because 'they cannot perpetually maintain their position in what we have called the paradise of archetypes', or a present cotemporal with the primordial Time (Ibid.). Hence, to the extent that the natural cycle of the seasons becomes *invested* with this symbolic significance, it is from a source of meaning that is 'different in origin and structure' from the natural 'year' (Eliade, 1963, pp. 50-51).

This antireductive insight is explained more clearly in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, where Eliade argues that 'primitive' ontological conceptions depend on two basic ideas: 'an object is real only insofar as it imitates or repeats an archetype' originating *in illo tempore*, and in such repetition, 'there is an implicit abolition of profane time, of duration, of "history"':

A sacrifice, for example, not only exactly reproduces the initial sacrifice revealed by a god *ab origine*, at the beginning of time, it also takes place at the same primordial moment ... through the paradox of rite, profane time and duration are suspended (Eliade, 1974, p. 35).

From these and a host of similar observations about sacrifices, sacraments marking special occasions, and medicinal rituals in archaic religions such as the Vedantic Hinduism, Eliade draws the conclusion that 'all these instruments of regeneration tend toward the same end: to annul past time, to abolish history by a continuous return *in illo tempore*, by the repetition of the cosmogonic act' (Ibid., p. 81). But although he says "'historical" memory, that is, the recollection of events that derive from no archetype ... is intolerable' to persons in prehistorical communities (Ibid., p. 75), Eliade also argues that the urge to oppose and contain linear history is even more pronounced in the religions of historical societies: 'New Year scenarios in which the Creation is repeated are particularly explicit among the historical peoples ... Babylonians, Egyptians, Hebrews, Iranians' (Ibid., p. 74). One might then ask whether this is consistent with Eliade's framework, since in *ahistorical* archaic ontology, the repetition of creation aims to prevent the very conception of profane time that historical cultures by definition recog-

nize. Yet as we will see, this point has an important explanation that is not at odds with Eliade's analysis.

Although archaic ontologies project onto the profane world (read: the *doxa*, the *everyday*, or the *saeculum*) a cyclical pattern of significance which sacralizes profane time and prevents it from becoming historical, these ontologies nevertheless do not deny the absolute *opposition* between the sacred and profane. The significance of the profane derives by contrast from the sacred, because the notion of a sacred primordial beginning already presupposes the profane. The New Year rituals Eliade catalogues clearly show that cosmogony includes as part of its structure the *destruction* of the profane: in effect, such rituals 'end' linear time before it has even begun. For example, 'the *aktiu* festival comprises a series of dramatic elements, the intention of which is the abolition of past time, the restoration of primordial chaos, and the repetition of the cosmogonic act' (Ibid., p. 57). In this structure, there is thus an ordinal divide between the sacred and the profane, an *order* that corresponds to a *valorization*: the sacred creation or the 'procession' of being from the origin, is superior because it *succeeds* the preceding chaos in the very act of destroying it. Nor can this sacred reality be imagined except as a successor to the profane: thus the chaos of Tiamat must even be symbolically restored in the *aktiu* ritual before the creation can be symbolically re-enacted. Because this ordinal relation between the sacred and profane is *irreversible*, we can even recognize in it a proto-historical idea: the new creation is actually presented as the *heraifera* of a proto-eschatological combat and triumph over the profane.

However, the full transition to eschatology requires an additional element which is not even implicit in the cosmogonic notion of the sacred in relation to the profane. It requires an *ethical* sense of value that can motivate an interest in salvation; only with this element does religion acquire the 'soteriological' or *saving* function that is required for eschatological possibility to take on its distinctive significance. This additional element became available in what Karl Jaspers describes as 'the spiritual process that occurred between 800 and 200 B.C.' – the time of Confucius, Lao-tse, the *Upanishads*, Zoroastrianism, the Jewish prophets, and the Greek philosophers and tragedians – which he calls the 'Axial Period' (Jaspers, 1986, p. 282–3).

V. THE AXIAL REVOLUTION: EPIC SELF-DISCOVERY, HEROIC INWARD VIRTUE, AND TRAGEDY

Jaspers understands the great transition in the Axial age as the 'step into universality', the emergence of reason as opposed to myth, which made the individual 'capable of confronting inwardly the entire universe' (Ibid., pp. 383–4). However, out of the many parallel developments he finds in Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, the Jewish prophets, Confucianism, and Greek philosophy, there are two aspects I want to emphasize. First, this period was the birth of an ethical consciousness that is not found explicitly in mythology: 'Religion was rendered ethical' (Ibid., p. 384). Second, with this goes a new sense of the imperfection of present existence and a desire for salvation: the human being 'experiences the terrible nature of the world and his own impotence ... Face to face with the void he strives for liberation and redemption' (Ibid., p. 383). In

this lies both the impetus to unity with the divine (Ibid., p. 385), and to create new institutions: 'Men see themselves faced by catastrophe and feel the desire to help through insight, education, and reform' (Ibid., p. 386). Jaspers sees these developments as the decisive turning point in human culture, 'the empirically evident axis of world history for all mankind' (Ibid., p. 387).

John Hick's account in *An Interpretation of Religion* largely agrees with Jaspers. Hick points out that while soteriological elements are present in 'pre-axial' religions (which correspond to those with an 'archaic' ontology and practice in Eliade's sense) such systems of myth and ritual are mainly concerned with defining a 'meaning-bestowing framework' that maintains social cohesion, rather than with the 'radical transformation' of human life that we find in ideals of individual salvation in axial religions (Hick, 1989, p. 23). As Hick's account suggests, the fundamental change at work in this conversion is the emergence of the *ethical* form of value linked with the increasing importance of individual agency and character in relation to ideals of well-being and justice, which become increasingly independent of the archaic ontologies.

My goal in this section is to begin the argument for the third thesis of the paper by giving an overall sense of how these diverse changes are interconnected and can be understood as characterizing a fundamental 'shift' in human thinking. The result of this revolution is epitomized in Socrates' insistence (as portrayed in the *Euthyphro*) that something is not good simply because a god commanded it; rather, a god worthy of worship commands something because it is good in its own right. This implies an essential inversion of archaic ontology: normative authority is based in a new independent ideal of the Good, and except by reference to this, divinity can only have positive authority. The pre-axial sacred that was defined in terms of repeating a divine paradigm thus appears purely *positive* and without inward justification on this new scale. As a result, the sacred is reconceived as a power that determines reality in line with what is good in the ethically ideal sense: thus Socrates' famous declaration in the *Apology* that 'I do not believe the law of God permits a better man to be harmed by a worse' (Plato, 30d). This view, which fits with Plato's explicitly eschatological myths in several dialogues (most notably, the *Phaedo*), shows that Plato's own philosophy has reconceived ontology *axially* (or in terms of ethical value): the Good becomes the transcendental origin of Being itself, and God as eternal reality must be Good in this new sense (*Republic II*, 379 b–e).

While eudaimonism is one of its results, the 'axial revolution' as I employ the term covers a very complex set of concurrent developments, which can only be outlined here. They include, for example: (1) the development of hero legends, which are directly related to the emergence of historical consciousness; (2) the development of *epic narrative structure*, with its motifs for individual self-discovery – the quest journey and descent into the underworld; and (3) the replacement of 'blood feud' honor codes with *law* as the focus of allegiance and social unity – as symbolized, for example, in the end of the *Orestia* and in Plato's *Crito*. (4) Along with these developments went a new sense of the *coming-into-being* of the everyday world, which motivates literary tragedy and leads Plato and Aristotle to reconceive virtue (*arete*) as an inward dispositional quality not determined by birth-caste and removed from the mutability of outward fortune.

These modifications only become necessary once tribal identification and the outcomes of natural contingency can come into contrast with the axial notion of a universal *ethical* paradigm. In pre-axial consciousness, as we saw with Eliade, natural contingency is sacralized by being cyclicized, and the tribal authorities draw their sovereignty directly from their ritual role in hierophany. As Eric Voegelin perceived, in this archaic notion of sovereignty, 'society itself becomes the representative of something beyond itself, of a transcendent reality' (Voegelin, 1952, p. 54). He contrasts this original form of sovereign authority with the different notion of legitimacy that emerged in the axial period, which he follows Jaspers in calling 'the axis time of human history, the one great epoch that is relevant for all mankind' (Voegelin, 1952, p. 60). The 'source of a new authority' discovered in this axial revolution is the human *noûs* as the sensorium of an unseen, divine *mesurè* (Voegelin, 1952, p. 68), or 'the psyche as the sensorium of transcendence' (Voegelin, 1952, p. 75). In this fundamental shift, the individual mind acquires access to the *universal*.

This 'axial revolution' is not strictly the product of recognizably philosophical thought and dramatic literature that broke with the anonymity of myth, however. On the contrary, a good index for the fundamental change at work in this axial transformation of consciousness is the change in the meaning of *aretè* or excellence which was already beginning in what Alasdair MacIntyre and others have called 'heroic societies' (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 121-130). As Neil Forsyth points out, 'most heroic poems fit the category of legend, in that they take place in a time when the world was much as it is now, and we are told about figures believed to have lived in the recent past rather than in the mythological time of the beginnings' (Forsyth, 1987, p. 11). Legends like myths are considered 'true' but they are about history rather than the sacred *in illo tempore* (Forsyth, 1987, p. 9). In fact, in hero-centered epics such as *Gilgamesh*, the *Odyssey*, and *Beowulf*, we already have an emergent proto-historical world view.

In Greek heroic culture as portrayed in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the notion of virtue or 'aretè' is already changing from its original pre-axial sense, which has nothing to do with the *ethical* question, 'How should I live?' In pre-Homeric Greek culture, dominated by feudalism and the tribe (or extended family) as the basic social unit, *aretè* originally names a general quality of outward power, appearance, and capacity (e.g., skill). As MacIntyre notes, *aretè* originally names 'excellence of any kind' (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 122) and includes, for example, the attractions of Penelope (Ibid., p. 127). In this original sense, *aretè* is thus a completely amoral concept, which stands mainly for that 'something' which the aristocratic heads of households have that sets them apart from those whose actions are seen as *purely* a function of their roles. What MacIntyre fails to note, however, is that the link the Homeric texts forge between 'virtue' in this original *purely external sense* and recognizably praiseworthy qualities, such as 'courage, friendship, fidelity' (Ibid., p. 124) is an *achievement* of the Homeric authors that turns the corner towards the axial conception of virtue developed by Plato and Aristotle.

We might doubt that anything like a notion of *norms* independent of the ritual significance of social roles is present in the Homeric conception of Greek heroic culture. But in fact the socio-ethical practices of such cultures derive their significance from the overarching mythological archetypes they express. In the heroic epics of Germanic cul-

tures, such as *Beowulf*, the sacred consists in an absolute power of Fate (the Anglo-Saxon *Wend*) just as in the myths collected in Hesiod, Zeus assumes the status of a one overarching archè, which steers the course of things to their end (see Heraclitus, Fragments D-K 32, 41, 64). In neither case is this power fully eschatological: it does not secure absolute final justice, but it does give the same significance to *all* human existence as mortal. Thus it is because epics focus on the place and meaning of human life in general, and use the sacred in the cosmogonic sense to answer this question, that epics *universalize* our understanding of human existence as such, conceiving it for the first time as a reality independent of particular social roles.

The *inwardizing* of virtue that takes place in epic can only make sense against this background: for when epic narratives identify the sacred with that which has *power over* the contingency of fortune, they make it possible to conceive the possession of *inward* character-traits of *aretè* as a participation in this sacred meaning independently of fortune. As we see in *Beowulf* for example, virtue is 'in the trying', in the will, and thus there is nobility even in defeat (Wright, 1957, pp. 12, 19) - something which is in principle impossible for a pre-axial, *purely external* conception of 'nobility'. The revolution in the conception of *aretè* that begins with epic thus has *as its very telos* the overcoming of 'moral luck' - an overcoming which is completed, as Bernard Williams says, in the ideal of a 'pure morality' and 'value that lies beyond all luck' (Williams, 1981, pp. 195-6).

It is also a sign of their axial significance that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* focus not only on social roles but on the individual stories of their heroes. The most potent contribution of the genres of saga and epic is their new idea of *self-discovery*. The theme of self-discovery is first created in epics by borrowing an archetypal narrative pattern from myth: that of *descent into an underworld*, which in all epic literature serves as a figure for descent into oneself, or the hero's inward discovery of his ownmost individual destiny and purpose. The event in which the hero is transformed through such a descent occupies a pivotal position in the plot structure of most epics: consider the descent scenes in the *Odyssey*, the *Aeneid*, and *Beowulf*, for example. There is no descent in the *Iliad* itself, but the myth cycle from which the *Iliad* derives *does* contain a figural 'descent': enclosure within the Wooden Horse of doom is not far in folklore terms from an archetypal return to the belly of an earth-goddess (see Frazer, ch. 6). The emphasis on self-discovery in epic agrees with the turn to individual moral character that transcends its purely outward social meanings. Thus nothing could be farther from the truth than MacIntyre's claim that 'the heroic self does not itself aspire to universality' because the hero's moral concepts are entirely determined by the particular social practices and roles of his culture (MacIntyre, 1984, p. 126). On the contrary, the epic hero *invariably responds to and expresses the human condition as such*, however the universal meaning of that condition is schematized in the cultural terms of this or that epic. Even MacIntyre, for example, recognizes that Homeric poetry includes 'a conception of the human condition as fragile and vulnerable to destiny and death' (Ibid., pp. 128-9) - a theme which is also crucial for the emergence of the *tragedy* as a literary form.

At the center of these changes in the axial revolution is what Hick calls a new aware-

ness of the importance of individual human agency, the capacity for 'a personal openness to transcendence' (Hick, 1994, p. 30), and as a result of these, a profound 'recognition that human existence is defective, unsatisfactory, lacking' (Ibid., p. 32). This darkened and tragic view of the human condition becomes possible only when the sacred is reconceived in terms of axial values and ideals, which no longer sacralize time but let its uncertainty and linearity emerge, opening a temporality that can now be seen as *evil* rather than 'profane': the problem is not the lack of hierophany, but that the paradigm of the Good is not realized in time. Accordingly, in many cultures, irreversible linear temporality is first given significant historical shape as a process of *decline from an idyllic past*. Thus it is a sure sign that the axial transformation has begun when a culture's myths and legend-cycles begin to emphasize the mortality of temporal existence and the inherent human vulnerability to evil and suffering. This is evident not only in Homeric heroic literature and post-Vedic Indian religions such as Buddhism, but also in Norse literature, which interprets suffering in terms of unshakable destiny, and places the highest value on the achievement of individual fame, 'the reputation we leave behind at our death' (Crossley-Holland, p. xix, quoting the *Hayward*). And these new axial themes so evident in the Norse *Eddas* and legendary sagas, as well as in epics such as *Beowulf* (see Earl, 1987, p. 168), are correlated with a historical conception of time and destiny culminating in an eschatological conflict (the 'Ragnarok').

Similar correlations can be found outside Indo-European cultures, e.g., in the cosmogonic and eschatological myths of the Aztecs, which portrayed the present condition as temporary and fragile, the last and most degenerate of the 'Five Ages', whose precarious existence could be maintained only by devotion to ritual human sacrifice. According to Kay Read, the 'temporal vision' of these myths and the need for sacrifice 'appeared to be based on a concept viewing the world as a place of suffering - a place in which such moral actions were not guaranteed to be positively rewarded ...' (Read, 1989, p. 114). Ironically then, although this sacrificial practice has been widely assumed to be a sign of anachronistic primitivity in the Aztec empire, it was actually an expression of historical and axial consciousness. It should not be surprising, then, that the Aztec leaders interpreted the arrival of the conquistadors as a sign of *apocalyptic* destruction.

VI. THE ESCHATON AS A CONVERGENCE BETWEEN THE GOOD AND THE REAL

This section further develops the argument for thesis (3) and completes the second stage in the analysis of eschatological meaning in general. The idea of personal salvation, which is essential to eschatology, only became possible through these revolutionary developments of the axial turn. The cosmogonic difference between sacred primordial reality and profane linear time was replaced by an *ethical* or normative contrast of our present existence with what Hick calls 'a limitlessly better state'. As a result, the central purpose of religion shifted from 'hierophany' or ontological hallowing of the world of profane space and time, to the absolute liberation of individuals. In this new *soteriological* (or 'salvation-oriented') outlook, the sacred or 'the ultimate, the

divine, the Real, is that which makes possible a transformation of our present existence' because of its 'ultimate unity of reality and value' (Hick, 1994, p. 33). Hick tells us that the cosmic optimism of post-axial religions (contrasted with their pessimism about proximate temporal existence) consisted in

... faith that the limitlessly good possibilities of existence will finally be realized. There is thus an essential temporal, and hence teleological or eschatological, dimension to this optimism (Ibid., p. 57).

What is essential to eschatological possibility, as Kierkegaard's delineation of faith already suggested, is thus a *combination* of (1) the numinous power of the sacred in its archaic form as the Archetypal Origin and (2) the new qualification of the Good that emerged in the upheavals of the axial age. Eschatology can only be what it is because the archaic division between the cosmogonic-sacred and the profane is *not* equivalent to the ethical distinction between good and evil. This axial distinction is a new experience that enables human beings for the first time to see the imperfection of natural conditions and the injustice of their social institutions as something to be overcome or escaped.

Thus in order for the meaning eschatological possibility acquires in the history of religion to be possible, inward individual consciousness of ethical ideality must be essentially *independent* of the older cosmogonic idea of ontological originality, the sacred *in illo tempore*. This does not mean, however, that this original axial experience was ever articulated in such a purely independent form. Rather, it is more likely that the very first cultural and philosophical attempts to express this fundamentally new experience of the Good already construed it *in terms* of the preceding paradigm: the pre-axial cosmogonic-sacred. In Blumenberg's terms, this suggests that the new axial experience of an ethical dimension of value was from the very beginning forced to *reoccupy the role* of the cosmogonic-sacred: it was made to function as a metaphysical principle assuring the appropriate order of all being. There are several grounds for this hypothesis. The most important is that it is only *in the light* of a new idea of the Good that the cosmogonic conception of the sacred itself could be transformed into eschatological conceptions of the sacred. Hence, we cannot explain this development from cosmogonic to eschatological religion without presupposing that implicit in the axial revolution was an experience of ethical reality, fundamentally independent of the prior experience of the sacred.

Yet this distinction was not clear to the ancient philosophers, and thus the new ethical ideal of the Good had to perform the older functions of the cosmogonic-sacred, **such as ensuring the intelligibility of the temporal world. This 'reoccupation' is perhaps most evident in the eudaemonistic notion of the Good as *Nature* - an interpretation that refused to recognize that the numinous archaic form of the sacred and the ethical ideal are unmediably distinct. For in eudaemonistic philosophy - as we already saw with Plato - what *ought* to be (the ethical) must turn out to coincide with *what is* (determined by the sacred power of fate). But such a concurrence is not essentially contained in the essence of the axial idea of what ought to be - otherwise this *ought-to-be* could**

never have furnished a basis for criticizing the actual state of affairs, or for perceiving events as *tragic*, or for the solerological inspiration to escape a world of suffering, a world recognized as *evil*. But admitting this would mean recognizing that such a concurrence between reality and the Good can only be an *addition* to the Good, i.e. a miraculous eschatological coincidence that is *gratuitous* relative to the ideal of the ethical. Eudaemonistic ethics thus makes the same connection between the good will and the ultimate outcome that we find in eschatology, but without recognizing that this connection represents an addition that *cannot be derived* from good will alone, i.e. a 'humanly impossible' or *absurd possibility*.

This shows the importance of distinguishing the axial idea of the Good from its teleological interpretations: it appears as *telos* only through reoccupying the role reserved for the cosmogonic-sacred. This in turn clarifies the similarity – and difference – between teleology and eschatology. As I have indicated, eschatological possibility also means a kind of a convergence of *what is* with *what ought to be*; but in eschatology, the axial ideal is related to the cosmogonic-numinous power determining reality without simply assimilating the Good itself into the numinous 'sacred' *in illo tempore*. Instead, the eschaton is a new image of the sacred which combines the Good and the ontological function of cosmogonic divinity, but without collapsing them. In eschatological divinity, the cosmogonic-numinous power of archaic mythology now complements and fulfills the axial ideal – but precisely by creating a possibility surpassing the ethical as such.

This analysis yields our first formula for the essence of eschatological possibility as a kind of modality:

Eschatological possibility is the ultimate convergence of what is Real or actual with what is Good according to an *independent* ethical standard, where this convergence is not part of the *nature* of the Good but is made possible by the numinous power of the Sacred (in the original cosmogonic sense). The eschaton, in other words, is an *axial hierophany*.

This formula makes clear that eschatology implicitly requires the distinction between the Good and cosmogonic-numinous divinity which eudaemonistic teleology has always levelled off. As we will see in the next two sections, this formula holds for all four of the basic kinds of eschatological conception that have developed since the 'axial age' of human culture.

This distinction between eschatology and teleology explains another observable difference between these concepts: teleological conceptions of the Good inevitably project a *single telos* as the natural correlate of a tendency or fulfillment of a striving, whereas eschatological finality projects *alternative possible tels* for human beings, which need not (even implicitly) be the intended goal of their will. Because eschatological possibility means numinous power gratuitously complementing an independent ethical distinction between good and evil, it tends to envision good and evil finalized in two opposite ultimate states. In final justice, the 'is' comes to agree with the 'ought,' but in two opposite ways – traditionally labelled *salvation and damnation* – corresponding to the doubleness in the axial difference between good and evil itself. This

also clarifies why, unlike a eudaemonistic single telos, eschatological possibility always involves a real 'doubleness' which allows human beings to stand in a *free* relation to it. For example, even the Norse *Wyrd* (or power of fate) is a numinous force that is mediated by axial differences: it is fate mixed with freedom, open to *alternatives* of honor or dishonor as individual eschatological possibilities.

It is therefore equally important to emphasize that in eschatology, the sacred is not simply *equated* with the Good in its axial sense either – that would be to level off entirely the *non-axial* cosmogonic element that remains in the sacred when it is conceived as *eschatological divinity*. In order for possibilities with the distinctive character of eschatological finality to be conceived, one must also grant independent status to *ethical possibilities* and to *agent-possibilities* (our limited potential to change temporal realities) as modalities in their own right, without reducing either to the other. Without the axial recognition that the Good and agent-power are different and *diverge* for human beings, making tragedy possible, the eschatological possibilities opened by a divinity which promises their ultimate *reconvergence* are not within our horizon. This is why Kierkegaard, for example, must first distinguish the *ethical* from the *aesthetic* 'sphere of existence', and allow for ethical despair over the aesthetic, before he can clarify the *religious* as faith in the 'absurd' possibilities of eschatology.

VII. SOTERIOLOGICAL ESCHATOLOGY AND THE INVERSION IN TIME-SYMBOLISM

We have thus reached a richer understanding of the meaning or essential features of eschatology. But to attain the fullest interpretation of eschatological modality in general, we must now consider the range of different possible eschatological doctrines the notion allows. Since it is obviously impossible to review every particular eschatological creed or conception in the history of religion, the next three sections will compare the salient features of the three *most basic kinds* of eschatological conception we find in religious history after the shift from cosmogonic mythology to the 'axial' ideal of salvation is made. Together with the conception of the sacred as the cosmogonic *in illo tempore*, we will therefore have a provisional taxonomy of the four basic types of conception of divine ultimacy in the history of eschatological beliefs. This analysis will also explain how each of the later forms of eschatological belief emerges from the antecedent forms, concluding with the grounds for thesis (4) of this paper.

We have already seen that the significance of eschatology for personal salvation (its 'soteriological' significance) becomes possible through the emergence of a new consciousness of ethical contrasts that permits awareness of unrepeatable time along with its *contingency* and 'evil'. But the *fatal* aspect which we find in so many eschatologies did not immediately develop out of the axial orientation to soteriology. Thus, as Hick recognizes, both 'communal-historical' and 'individual-ahistorical' forms of the 'teleological or eschatological outlook' developed (Hick, 1989, p. 61). In Buddhism and post-Vedic Hinduism of the *Brahmavaivarta Purana*, the world of suffering or *samsara* was a vast cycle of ages, or *yugas*: what Eliade calls the 'Mahayanic vision of the cosmic cycle' (Eliade, 1974, p. 117), is in effect similar to the vision of profane

existence as a 'beginningless and endless flows of interdependent change' which is thus absolutely ahistorical (Hick, 1989, p. 62). In this flux of yugas, endless repetition of rebirth was assured unless one broke out of this cycle by achieving Nirvana. As an end which breaks the cycle permanently for the individual, then, Nirvana is an *eschatological* concept: as Hick says, 'Moksha/Nirvana, then, is for the Indian religions the blessed eschaton for which believers hope and towards they strive' (ibid., p. 65). Similarly, in commenting on the eschatology of the *Upanishads*, J.T. Fraser points out that 'The absence of an ending of world-time is not equivalent to a prohibition against the desire of the individual for atemporal states' (Fraser, 1975, p. 172). Personal eschatology is possible without cosmic eschatology.

Personal eschatology in this mode gives no 'historical' shape or significance to profane time, because the state of beatitude is entirely atemporal, like Plato's heaven. But nevertheless it involves two of the most quintessential features of eschatological possibility: a *value-based* double-teleology and a notion of *finality*. Depending on *karma* acquired in one's life through discipline and beneficence (or their opposites), one either moves *up or down* in caste or 'order of being' at each rebirth, until one ultimately escapes reincarnation altogether. As Eliade emphasizes, the 'headlong multiplications of cosmic cycles' in Indian post-axial religion thus served an essential 'soteriological aim':

Terrified by the endless births and rebirths of universes, accompanied by an equal number of human births and rebirths governed by the law of karma, the Indian was obliged, as it were, to seek an issue from this cosmic wheel and these infinite transmutations (Eliade, 1957, p. 185).

Here we see that soteriology is not limited to the conception of ultimate reality outside time as a single absolute telos: it also depends on the *horror* of the opposite possibility.

G. van der Leeuw makes the same connection between the primordial eschatological ideal of escaping cyclic time and the axial shift in the evaluation of social and temporal existence: 'The stupendous idea of an end of time is an attempt to negate the eternal stasis, to break the circle. All peoples that have awakened to the suffering and hope of the *condition humaine* have arrived at this idea' (van der Leeuw, 1957, p. 338). This novel idea that ultimate reality is the end of *cyclic existence*, however, depends on what must be the most surprising aspect of post-axial Indian religion, given the background we have covered: the same cyclic pattern which archaic ontology used to maintain the hierophany of *sacred reality* in social existence against the 'profanity' of linear time, is now regarded in these Indian religions as the absolute expression of the *profane* understood in axial terms as *evil*, the horrifying *samsara* (or 'world of suffering') that must be escaped. Eliade still maintains that 'Indian speculations on cyclical time reveal a sufficiently marked "refusal of history"', but he acknowledges that the *meaning* expressed by cyclic time has been inverted in the axial period:

... whereas the man of the traditional cultures refuses history through periodic abolition of the Creation, thus living over and over again in the same atemporal instant, the Indian spirit, in its supreme tensions, dispartages and even rejects this same reactualization of

auroral time, which it no longer regards as an effective solution to the problem of suffering. The difference between the Vedic (hence archaic and primitive) vision and the Mahayanic vision of the cosmic cycle is, in sum, the very difference that distinguishes the archetypal (traditional) anthropological position from the existentialist (historical position) (Eliade, 1974, p. 117).

Although Eliade does not sufficiently explain it, it was almost certainly the new ethical perception of imperfection and evil in life that allowed this radical reversal in the symbolic significance of cyclic time. For example, like the Buddhist cycles, the Stoic idea of an eternal recurrence was supposed to horrify the follower out of his or her concern for merely temporal goods.

Correspondingly, this inversion also implies that the projection of the individual into sacred reality (now ethically qualified), in contrast to the profane wheel of rebirth, is a *linear* move characterized by the irreversibility of personal finality. This supplies the first paradigm in which unidirectional linearity can be a mode of significance, a mode of access to the sacred – the notion needed for historical consciousness to emerge. Thus, within personal or soteriological conceptions of eschatology, a dramatic reversal in symbolic significance is achieved: linearity can be a form of access to the sacred, a form of hierophany, whereas cyclic time is profane.

VIII. FROM APOCALYPTIC TO RADICALLY HISTORICAL ESCHATOLOGY

Thus, while post-axial Indian religions retain the archaic idea of a projection by ritual out of profane time into sacred reality, in them sacred reality acquires a *new meaning*: as soteriological, it becomes something that stands out from the cycle as an end or *telos*. Because of this new meaning, projection into the sacred reality is no longer the cosmogonic source of reality that hallows profane time. If sacred reality in this new soteriological sense is to have any *positive* hierophantic significance for the temporal world (the 'doxa'), it can 'hallow' temporal existence and dispel its profanity only by giving it teleological significance, i.e. giving it the very *linearity* that archaic ontology abhorred. As a result, after the axial revolution, sacred reality becomes 'moveable' from the cosmogonic point, as Eliade said: it is reconceived as a sacred reality *to come*, a locus of eschatological possibilities that can give historical structure to the world of profane temporality. The eschaton, in other words, becomes the form of sacred that can simultaneously serve *both* the soteriological purposes required by axial consciousness, and the original hierophantic purposes of sacred cosmogony: the fullest meaning of eschatological modality is dictated by these joint functions.

The implications of this shift for human consciousness are more fundamental than is often recognized. With the futuristic conception of the *sacred as eschaton* in the complete sense, the soteriological relation of persons to the sacred is no longer just an individual relation to a static eternal ideal: it involves the end of the cosmos as well. The individual's 'absolute relation to the Absolute', as Kierkegaard called faith in eschatological divinity, thus becomes part of the *same* historical process through which time becomes meaningful. Thus, as Neil Forsyth points out,

What distinguishes both Jewish and Christian religious systems ... is that they elevate to the sacred status of myth narratives that are situated in historical time. Both therefore claim the continuing activity of God in history and so sanctify ordinary human time (Forsyth, 1987, p. 9).

The line between mythology as the narrative of the ahistorical sacred in *illo tempore* and legend as the narrative of 'profane' existential experience is thereby blurred.

In addition, it is only with this full formation of the eschaton as futural that narrative forms of temporal significance such as *tradition* first become possible. In ahistorical cultures, as we saw, the sacred origin in *illo tempore* is precisely not the 'origin of time' in the linear sense, but the origin of Being whose continual recreation prevents time from flowing. Thus although Eliade, following other ethnographers, uses the term 'traditional' for societies in which myth and ritual function in this hierophantic fashion, their oral 'handing down' of the sacred stories and ritual practices is *not* intended to constitute a 'tradition' in our sense of the term. For tradition is a source of historicity: it does not exist without an awareness of *inheritance* over a period of linear time that becomes 'historical' partly by virtue of traditional schematization: an essential part of the significance of a 'tradition' is thus to give narrative shape and meaning to what would otherwise be an undifferentiated linear flow of life. For archaic societies, however, the difficulty of hallowing a temporality recognized to be directional in the sense of absolutely unrepeatable does not yet constitute a central problem. It is only when profane time has acquired the significance of forward direction, and its eschatological hallowing is *futural*, that the 'origin' becomes the *beginning of time per se*; then inheritance, which understands itself as tradition, can claim to *extend* the meaning-endowing possibilities of the sacred in *illo tempore* into historical time, pending its eschatological culmination. In the post-axial context, tradition thus performs the same function as the ritual *repetition* of cosmogony performed in archaic religion. Once the evolution of the eschaton into a futural sacred is complete, and once the 'origin' in *illo tempore* correspondingly assumes the new position as its *temporal* beginning, the sacred foundational values associated with cosmogony are no longer recoverable by direct projection (since that would now be a *temporal* rather than a hierarchical movement): they are recoverable only in *living traditions*, in which the paradigms are never simply repeated but always reinterpreted, or, as Heidegger says, 'rejoined' in *innovative tropes* of the cosmogonic forms. Tradition in this sense is a narrative composed of what Heidegger called 'reciprocal rejoinders' or encounters with history that involve both passive reception and active reinterpretation (cf. Watson, 1997, Prologue).

Note that this helps explain the anomaly we noted earlier in Eliade's analysis, namely that historical cultures are even more fervent about their New Year rituals. In such cultures, their repetition of the origin has become self-conscious as a tradition, which at the same time means they recognize that what they are retrieving transcends perfect re-enactment precisely because it is a foundation with a temporal location at the beginning.

In summary, this analysis suggests three distinct stages in the development from cosmogonic to eschatological concepts of ultimate reality. These 'stages' are obviously

abstractions of beliefs that were found in many different partial combinations in the history of religion, but distinguishing them helps bring out the core features in the notion of the 'hereafter':

1. *Prehistorical Protoeschatology*: Ultimate reality as a continually reenacted primordial 'Time,' a cosmogonic (and thus proto-eschatological) reality 'above' profane existence, which is not allowed to become 'time' in the sense of a profane linear history. The ultimate reality thus has no position in historical time in our sense at all: it is the transcendent hierophany that infuses profane existence with 'the plenitude of a present that contains no trace of history' (Eliade, 1974, p. 76).
2. *Ahistorical Sociological Eschatology*: Ultimate reality as an implicitly eschatological escape from profane time now conceived as cyclic, an irreversible release from the evil of profane existence into the sacred reality identified as an ultimate good for the individual. Ultimate reality still stands over against profane time, yet now serves no hierophantic function for the temporal cosmos, but only a sociological function for the individual: it leaves 'the everyday' world cyclic and ahistorical.
3. *Fully Apocalyptic Eschatology*: Ultimate reality now has both a sociological function as the ultimate good for the individual and a hierophantic function for the cosmos, by becoming a 'temporal' end' that makes profane time into history, a meaningful irreversible sequence. This also makes primordial Time into a historical 'beginning,' from which linear time can be given historical meaning in the narrative shape of traditions.

Thus the eschaton only acquires its *temporal* significance when it becomes an 'end' of the cycle not only for the individual but also for the cosmos. In the apocalypse, we have eschatology that can give significance to the linear time stemming from creation by bringing closure or a final end to that process. But even when eschatological doctrines include belief in an apocalypse or end of profane time, they do not necessarily give it any final significance or meaning: from the apocalyptic perspective, the temporal world may appear to be a mere stage on which the curtain falls when the time comes, or even an earthly illusion from which we emerge. Although in light of the futural possibility expressed by the expected apocalypse, temporal existence takes on the intelligible form of history, this meaning granted to the profane world – the *saeculum* – is only temporary and instrumental if historical temporality is but a ladder that will be thrown away when we reach our final goal. In Zoroastrianism, for example, the eschaton spells the absolute destruction of imperfect temporal reality, leading to a purely spiritual hereafter that is symmetrical with a sacred reality before creation; it does not renew or recreate the temporal order. The same is true in orthodox (i.e. Ash'arite) Islamic eschatology. On these conceptions, then, the Sacred at the end of time involves no final hierophany: it does not become immanent within the profane cosmos, purifying it in a final hallowing. Rather, the hereafter re-establishes the same sacred reality that existed in the beginning, in *illo tempore*.

On these grounds, Eliade argues that even religions with *futural* eschatologies,

apparently implying an irreversible linear time, have the same underlying goal of 'abolishing history' as found in archaic ontology:

Messianic beliefs in a final regeneration of the world themselves indicate an antihistorical attitude. Since he can no longer periodically abolish history, the Hebrew tolerates it in the hope that it will finally end, at some more or less distant future moment. The irreversibility of historical events and of time is compensated by the limitation of history to time ... History ... is abolished in the future. Periodic regeneration of the Creation is replaced by a single regeneration that will take place in an *in illo tempore* to come (Eliade, 1974, pp. 111-113).

In other words, although time is linear, its closure makes 'history' ultimately a circle. On this analysis, history must end *with time* in the apocalypse. The eschatological event itself is thus not an *advance* on the original cosmogonic state; it is not 'historical' relative to the primordial Time of the beginning. Thus the irreversibility of history is not absolute, because in the widest context of all, the movement is still circular.

But this part of Eliade's analysis is falsified by the last and most radical kind of eschatological belief, in which the *hereafter* represents an ultimate reality even more holy, perfect, and complete than the original reality of primordial Time. When eschatology is conceived this way, then from the widest perspective, there is no longer a circle but an *ultimate progression*. We must therefore distinguish a *fourth* possible kind of eschatological conception that Eliade failed to recognize:

4. *Radically Historical Eschatology*: The 'hereafter' has both soteriological and hierophantic functions but is *not a return* to the primordial Time. The *soteriological* sacred of the ultimate end is not identical with, but *teleologically* related to, the sacred at the beginning, which is the source of values and norms. The sacred as a whole thus becomes equivocal and hierarchically differentiated: the eschatological sacred as *endzeit* transcends the archetypal sacred as *primordial urzeit*.

For example, the Nicene Creed's declaration of a bodily resurrection in a Kingdom that enters the profane world itself (thus making an absolute division between two 'stages' of that world), represents one particular instance of a 'radically' historical conception of eschatology.

In this radically historical mode of eschatology, then, the process leading from cosmogonic beginning to the eschatological hereafter constitutes an *ultimate linear narrative*, in which the very nature of the sacred reality itself undergoes an *irreversible progression*. The sacred or divine is therefore no longer univocal: it is 'temporalized' by an internal difference. In this radical paradigm, moreover, history is no longer the moving reflection of a static heaven, but rather the very medium of *divine becoming*: process is more sacred than Platonic immutability. Thus Kierkegaard argues, rejecting the static divinity of Neoplatonic theology, that specifically Christian religiousness 'lies in the dialectic of which governs intensification and inwardness, and hence ... is sympathetic with the conception of God that He is Himself moved, changed' (Kierke-

gaard, 1941, p. 387, note 2). Nikolai Berdyaev expresses the same 'radically historical' conception of eschatology when he writes:

The Kingdom of God denotes not only redemption from sin and a return to original purity, but the creation of a new world. Every authentic creative act of man enters into it, every real liberation. It is not only the other world, it is this world transfigured. It is the liberation of nature from captivity ... (Berdyaev, 1944, pp. 266).

In sum, a 'radically historical' conception of eschatology involves the possibility that the profane world will be *preserved and transformed* within the 'hereafter', becoming part of the *enlarged* final Sacred reality itself. Moreover, as Eliade fails to perceive, the tendency of Jewish eschatological ideas in the prophetic period was already towards such a radically historical conception, in which the 'Coming Age' following the messianic period occurs *in this world itself* - an eternal life in which the whole of existence has become the 'Garden of Eden.' As one contemporary scholar puts it, Judaism in its eschatological thought remains 'a thoroughly this-worldly religion' (de Lange, 1986, p. 130). Thus in Martin Buber's Hasidism, for example, eschatology is an irreversible transformation of this world. As he says in *The Way of Man*,

Judaism ... teaches that what a man does now and here with holy intent is no less important, no less true - being terrestrial indeed, but none the less factual link with divine being - than the life in the world to come ... 'Other nations too believe that there are two worlds ... The difference is this: They think that the two are separate and severed, but Israel professes that the two worlds are essentially one and shall in fact become one. ... Man was created for the purpose of unifying the two worlds (Buber, 1966, pp. 39-40).

In Buber's Hasidic faith, the eschatological hierophany of the temporal world - the hal-
lowing of the everyday - occurs through human love; it leads to a 'hereafter' that does not abolish the profane world in favor of a purely spiritual existence, but finalizes and completes its hallowing. In Jewish thought as well, however, we find Neo-Platonic thinkers such as Maimonides, who defended a 'fully apocalyptic' conception of eschatology that rejects the radically historical conception, and thus preserves the *circle* of procession-return (and the unchangeability of the sacred reality) at the highest level. Maimonides conceives the 'Coming Age' as 'a purely spiritual reunion of the immortal soul with God, while the ultimate punishment for evil-doing is the annihilation of the soul' (de Lange, 1986, p. 132). This contrast between Maimonides and Buber nicely illustrates the difference between the third and fourth stages of eschatological conceptions.

IX. THE PARADOXICAL CORE NOTION OF ESCHATOLOGY

This taxonomy of four basic kinds of eschatological belief clarifies the essential meaning of eschatological modality. In light of this analysis, it is now possible to isolate 'core' features of eschatological possibility in any given eschatological conception of URAM. Moreover, as thesis (2) claimed, this core structure of eschatology is paradoxical.

cal, because it combines elements of historical temporality and static or archetypal universality. This combination itself results from the synthesis (described in §VI) in all eschatologies between the cosmogonic power of determining the Real (which makes possible the transformation of the material world) and the soteriological significance of Good. This results in *four* central features of eschatology:

(α) Aside from the literal idea that the 'end of time' is an event in the future, the hereafter is analogous to future contingency in a crucial respect: it is open to *alternative possibilities*. Thus eschatological meaning, like temporality, may be closely related to the moral significance of human freedom. Søren Kierkegaard's idea of the existential *anxiety* of faith in consciousness of sin, and Martin Heidegger's idea that *Dasein* has in its being-towards-death a freedom for different possible 'ownmost meanings,' are two perspectives in which the full meaning of freedom depends on irreducibly eschatological possibilities. This feature of eschatology arises ultimately from its axial significance.

(β) But eschatological reality cannot – without completely destroying its sacred meaning – be conceived as merely a *future period* of historical time: as Berdyaev observes, eschatology envisions not only a 'change in time,' but the 'change of time itself ... an end of time' (Berdyaev, 1944, p. 258). Thus eschatology essentially requires what I will call an absolute *braché* in time. The hereafter cannot be reduced to a literally future utopia, separated perhaps by some momentous occurrence, but still remaining in the same underlying temporality. Such a 'purely temporal' interpretation of eschatology would entirely level off the *radical difference* between the sacred and profane, which is central to eschatological meaning. Thus a purely physicalist interpretation of eschatological temporality is impossible: as Carl Jung said, 'Religious statements ... refer without exception to things that cannot be established as physical facts' (Jung, 1973, p. xii). Nowhere is this more true than in the idea of the hereafter.

(γ) Unlike a series unified by an underlying time-time, eschatological absoluteness is also inherently divided into glory and horror. Whether or not it includes any *actual* condition we would call damnation, it necessarily *denies* the inclusion of opposite potential absolute states of value in a single encompassing reality: 'hell' as a state of ultimate perdition is totally alien from the reality of 'heaven', or if the two are *not* inaccessible from one another (i.e. if passage out of hell is possible), then there is no state of ultimate perdition. Since it is difficult to find an apt term for this feature, I will refer to it simply as the *radical doubleness* of the possible eschatological hereafter: this suggests the idea of two utterly sundered states, so separated that each is infinitely inaccessible from and incommensurable with the other. The term *dualism* could also be used, but this has too many associations with mind/body dualism, which is not essential to eschatological conceptions, and with Manichean two-principle cosmologies. Although a Manichean conception of eschatology is certainly one possible coherent view, the *potential doubleness* of eschatology generally is a deeper structure that is probably compatible with Augustinian denials of Manichean dualism and a theology which claims that evil only has derivative reality as a perversion of the good.

(δ) Finally, unlike later events in time that can be meaningful only as *future possibilities* and thus remain only indirectly accessible, eschatological sacred reality must

always be *directly* accessible. Like the eternity of Platonic archetypes or universals, eschatological reality is always meaningful as a *present* possibility for mortal persons, which is accessible to them *throughout* 'profane' time. John Hick says that

... in Semitic and Indian traditions alike the eschatological reality is not only a future state occurring beyond death but also – giving their gospels an immediate excitement and challenge – a limitlessly better existence which can and should be entered upon now, in the midst of this present life (Hick, 1989, p. 65).

This openness to an eschatological reality that is accessible from *any* point in historical time reflects the fact that the hereafter must in some respects be *atemporal*, like an eternity that *stands over against* the temporal world and is accessible from many points. Berdyaev, for example, suggests that eschatology is experienced as the 'breakthrough of metahistory' into our historical time (Berdyaev, 1944, p. 255), or as the sudden 'interruption of events belonging to existential time' (Ibid., p. 262), which is an instantaneous projection into an eternity beyond history (Ibid., p. 261). It is this aspect of eschatology which also leads the Jewish existentialist Emmanuel Levinas to emphasize the *transcendence* of the eschatological 'beyond':

It is not the last judgment that is decisive, but the judgment of all the instants of time, when the living are judged. The eschatological notion of judgment ... implies that beings have an identity "before" eternity, before the accomplishment of history, before the fullness of time, while there is still time (Levinas, 1969, p. 23).

To be eschatological, in other words, possibilities must have direct existential significance for individual persons in their temporal existence; persons who 'have time' still. I will refer to this fourth essential feature of the eschatological as its eternity-like *multiple accessibility*.

In his invaluable discussion of changing ideas of eschatology from late antiquity to the Renaissance, J.G.A. Pocock notes that Augustine's radical separation between eschatological reality and political events in 'profane' time attempted to put all the emphasis on feature (δ) making the hereafter a purely eternal reality. As he argues, Augustine was reacting to separatist chiliastic movements whose account was one-sided in the other direction: they emphasized the *temporal* aspect of eschatology to such an extent that its significance was completely secularized. 'In this apocalyptic separatism – creation out of eschatology of a counter history expected in a future – we have that *millennialism* or *millenarianism* which Christians of all ages have used to express their rebellions against established churches' (Pocock, 1975, p. 34). But in 'eternalizing' the eschaton in response, Pocock suggests, Augustine went to the other extreme and made it impossible to believe that salvation was 'the outcome of a historical process' to which 'the structures of civil society are relevant, or to see that 'it was society and history which needed to be redeemed' (Pocock, 1975, pp. 33–34). These functions require an eschatology that has a *temporal* significance, while its *personal* soteriological significance still requires 'multiple accessibility':

... if salvation was for individuals, and individual lives did not span the whole of history, the ends of time were not all located at the end of time. The eschatological vision became, in the Augustinian perspective, a vision of something in part extra-historical. It might seem that the individual's salvation or damnation took place at the hour of his death, the moment of his departure from time into eternity; the historical eschaton, to be expected at the end of time, was rather the resurrection of the body (Pocock, 1975, p. 35).

This core feature of eschatology is thus required by the soteriological function of eschatological possibility: as we saw, from its ahistorical form (stage two) in which individual escape from the cycle is all there is to the hereafter, the eschaton developed an analogous temporal significance for the whole world in order to take over archaic cosmogony's function of hallowing the profane time (by hierophany). A close analogical relation between *individual* death and *cosmic* apocalypse is thus essential to eschatological meaning in its more 'advanced' forms. As J.T. Fraser says, the moral significance of the eschaton means that the future is conceived in terms of its *personal* significance: 'It also suggests [a] certain intimacy between the end of the self and that of the world' (Fraser, 1975, p. 169). Thus, as our examples from Buber and Kierkegaard suggested, the interpretation of 'death in existential thought' derives from eschatological ideas (Fraser, 1975, p. 174).

In fact, the full meaning of eschatological modality requires all four of these core features: (α) its 'futural' freedom for alternative possibilities; (β) its apocalyptic difference or radical break with natural time; (γ) its existential doubleness (or bifurcated time. Previous analyses of eschatology have often stressed some of these essential aspects at the expense of the others. For example, Hans Blumenberg's portrayal of eschatology as the absolute antithesis of historical time emphasizes features (β) and (γ), the *atemporality* and absolute breach of the eschaton, at the expense of its role in giving ethical meaning to history (Blumenberg, 1983, p. 30).

Some millenarian interpretations of eschatology are over extensions of the opposite insight: if the eschaton is to have transformative significance for the natural world itself – or if it is even to function as *apocalypse* – then it cannot be completely dissociated from the historical *future*. Yet as a result, millenarians tend to underestimate features (α) and (δ): if the modal indeterminacy and eternity of the hereafter (which makes it 'multiply accessible') are removed, eschatological possibility becomes 'purely temporal': it is then completely *secularized* or *naturalized*, and its radically distinct modal meaning is reduced, in the last analysis, to political and scientific possibilities under human control. Thus temporalizing eschatology can even lead, in its extreme cases, to misappropriations such as plans to bring about total apocalyptic revolutions, pretensions to complete hermeneutic control vested in an elite with privileged prophetic gifts (e.g. the Imam), and claims to rational realization of the Absolute – to name only the less horrific forms of perverted eschatology. With the elimination of its radical atemporal difference, what millenarians hope to gain by reconnecting eschatology to natural time is again lost: the eschaton is once more unable to bring sacred reality into the profane time; it loses its *hierophantic* significance for history.

In conclusion, we have to hold both eternity and temporality together to preserve the tension that is essential for a fully eschatological possibility. The hereafter is differentiated from profane time by *transforming* the temporal world absolutely, by miraculously realizing in a world of impersonal chance and mutability the ultimate value that otherwise exists only as an eternal ideal. But on the other hand, to avoid the opposite danger of reducing the hereafter to a Platonic *aeternitas* entirely unconnected with secular history, we must connect it *apocalyptically* to historical time, and interpret its breach not as a complete deconstruction of the profane world but as the *finality* of the previous order itself – a finality transforming both the finitude of the universe and the eternity of the Creator by *joining* them in a new Absolute as eschaton.

This constitutive tension in eschatology is perhaps most completely preserved in the symbol of hereafter as a 'New Jerusalem', in which a purely spiritual God has merged His being absolutely with an earthly spatial reality to form a new 'Kingdom', an *ultimate* reality at once physical and spiritual, at once temporal and final. In this powerful symbol, we have an expression of the *most* radical conception of eschatology in human culture – eschatology in the radically historical sense, which implies an absolute synthesis of eternity and history that is richer than the sacred reality of the cosmogonic divinity itself.

REFERENCES

- St. Augustine. 1993. *On Free Choice of the Will*, trans. Thomas Williams. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Berdyaev, N. 1944. *Slavery and Freedom*, trans. R.M. French. New York: Charles Scribner's.
- Blumenberg, H. 1983. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Original German Version: 1966. *Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*. Suhrkamp Verlag.
- Boulting, N.E. 1993. 'Charles S. Peirce's Idea of Ultimate Reality and Meaning Related to Humanity's Ultimate Future as seen through Scientific Inquiry'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 16: 9-26.
- Buber, M. 1966. *The Way of Man According to the Teachings of Hasidism*. Secaucus: Citadel Press.
- 1985. 'Symbolic and Sacramental Existence in Judaism'. *Spiritual Disciplines: Papers from the Erasmus Yearbooks*, Vol. 4, trans. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XXX, ed. Joseph Campbell. Princeton: Princeton University Press/Bollingen Foundation.
- Crossley-Holland, K. 1982. *The Norse Myths*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Davidson, J.W. 1977. *The Logic of Millennial Thought*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- De Lange, N. 1986. *Judaism*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Earl, J. 1987. 'Transformation of Chaos: Immanence and Transcendence in Beowulf and Other Old English Poetry'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 10: 164-185.
- Eliade, M. 1957. 'Time and Eternity in Indian Thought'. *Papers from the Erasmus Yearbooks*, Vol. 3, trans. Ralph Manheim, Bollingen Series XXX, ed. Joseph Campbell. New York: Pantheon Books/Bollingen Foundation.
- 1959. *The Sacred and the Profane*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

- 1963. *Myth and Reality*. New York & London: Harper & Row.
- 1954, 1974. *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (originally titled *Cosmos and History*), trans. Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press/Bollingen Foundation.
- Faraoane, C. 1992. *Talismans and Trojan Horses*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Forsyth, N. 1987. *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Fraser, J.T. 1975, 1990. *Of Time, Passion, and Knowledge*, 2nd edition. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Chauncy, C. 1756. *The Earth Delivered from the Curse*. Boston
- Glasberg, R. 1995. 'Confronting Ultimate Reality in the Context of Historical Evolution: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of China, India, and the West'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*. 18: 303-322.
- 1996. 'The Evolution of the URAM Concept in the Journal: An Analytic Survey of Key Articles'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*. 19: 69-77.
- Haddad, Y.Y. and Smith, J.I. 1981. *The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Heidegger, M. 1969. *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row.
- 1985. *Schelling's Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Hick, J. 1960. 'Theology and Verification'. *Theology Today*. 17: 12-23. Reprinted 1971, 1991. *The Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Basil Mitchell. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 1989. *An Interpretation of Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Horvath, T. 1993. 'Presenting this Issue: Ultimate Reality and Meaning'. 16: 1-8.
- 1980. 'The Structure of Scientific Discovery and Man's Ultimate Reality and Meaning'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*. 3: 144-163.
- James, W. 1948. *Essays in Pragmatism*, ed. Albury Castell. New York: Hafner Press.
- Jaspers, K. 1986. *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. E. Ehrlich, L. Ehrlich, and G. Peper. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Jung, C.G. 1973. *Answer to Job*, trans. R.F.C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton University Press/Bollingen Foundation. Extracted from *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, Vol. 11 of the *Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. Herbert Read, Bollingen Series XX. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kant, I. 1788, 1993. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. Lewis White Beck. 3rd edition. New York & Toronto: MacMillan Publishing Company.
- Kierkegaard, S. 1941, 1974. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. David F. Swenson and Walter Lowrie. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 1984. *Fear and Trembling*, trans. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Leigh, D. 1995. 'Literature, Imagination, and the Study of Ultimate Reality'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*. 18: 222-245.
- Levinas, E. 1969. *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

- Lewis, C.S. 1960. *The World's Last Night and Other Essays*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.
- 1962, 1986. *The Problem of Pain*. New York: Macmillan.
- Machivrye, A. 1984. *After Virtue*. 2nd edition. South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Manno, A. 1982. 'Mircea Eliade's Hermeneutics'. *Imagination and Meaning: The Scholarly Works of Mircea Eliade*, ed. Norman Girardot and Mac Linscott Ricketts. The Seabury Press.
- Mester, F. 1995. 'Saint Ignatius of Loyola's Search for Ultimate Reality and Meaning'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*. 18: 75-91.
- Peirce, C.S. 1892. 'The Doctrine of Necessity Examined'. Reprinted in *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler. New York: Dover Publications.
- 1905. 'Issues of Pragmatism'. *The Monist*. 15: 481-499.
- Read, K.A. 1989. 'The Fleeting Moment: Cosmogony, Eschatology, and Ethics in Aztec Religion and Society'. *The Journal of Religious Ethics*. 14: 113-138.
- Otto, R. 1958. *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plato. 1963. *Collected Dialogues*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Bollingen Series LXXI. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Poock, J.G.A. 1975. *The Machivellian Moment*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Starkloff, C. 1995. 'In Search of "Ultimate Meaning" in Arapaho Tradition and Contemporary Experience'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*. 18: 249-263.
- Taite, A. 1995. 'Lord Herbert of Cherbury's Idea of Ultimate Reality and Meaning and a Note on the Popularization of Deism'. *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*. 18: 264-274.
- Tillich, P. 1957. *The Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Van der Leeuw, G. 1957. 'Primordial and Final Time'. *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, Vol. 3, trans. Ralph Manheim. Bollingen Series XXX, ed. Joseph Campbell. New York: Pantheon Books/Bollingen Foundation.
- Voegelien, E. 1952, 1987. *The New Science of Politics*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Watson, S. 1997. *Traditions*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Williams, B. 1981. 'Persons, Character, and Morality'. *Moral Luck: Philosophical Papers, 1973-1980*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 1985. *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wright, D. 1957. *Beowulf: A Prose Translation*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.